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Orleneff's Russian Lyceum

15-17 EAST THIRD STREET, NEW YORK

THE STAR

A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS

By HERMAN BAHR

(*Russian Translation by N. Budkevitch*)

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DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

LENA LYADINSER.
LEOPOLD WIESINGER.
MARTHA, his Sister.
GERTA DANZER, her Friend.
DOCTOR ENGELBERT ROHR.
INDRA, Leader of the Claque.
WIESCHDAK, a Wood-merchant.
FRÄULEIN ZINSER.
FLORA DENK, an Actress.
PETER GALLIUS.
VON SPAHN.
COUNT BLOWITZ.
MOSEL, Leader of the Orchestra.
BLUM, KOCH, } Authors of "The Violet."
WENIG, a Reporter.
FRANZ.
LINI.
MARIE.
A GENTLEMAN in Spectacles.

SYNOPSIS

ACT I

SCENE: *The boudoir of Lena Lyadinser.*

THE servants, Franz and Lini, are discussing the new play in which their mistress, "the Star," has made a failure on the previous evening. The critics have condemned things generally. Lini maintains that the police should have prevented the audience from hissing; Franz insists that the public, having paid their money, have a right to do as they please. It appears that the Star has been great friends with a Count, whom Franz served for twelve years. When the Count married he transferred Franz to the Star's service — and Franz is so ashamed of it that he has never been to see his mistress act since he entered her service — "she exhibits herself for money," he says scornfully. He is always bragging of his Count, and has learned to divide people into two categories: Those who have money but no manners, and are called "Mæcenases"; and those who have neither money nor manners, and are called "artists." Franz reads extracts from the morning papers, which declare that "the Star is setting"; that the actress plays every part in exactly the same manner, with the same meaningless smile and trick of displaying her pretty teeth — and so forth. Lini calls the critics "pigs!" Enter Lena and Fräulein Zinser. Fr. Zinser complains that Franz has not taken the dog out for its exercise; that he has to be told every day; and he is to take the animal at once, and let it walk slowly, that it may not get heated. Lena asks the maid whether she has telephoned to the theatre to announce that she, (the Star) is ill and cannot play that evening. The director is going to send the doctor, replies Lini. Fr. Zinser insists that Lena shall not allow herself to be persuaded to play, as on former occasions, but shall assert her rights with the Director, declaring that he is to blame for the failure. She then reads extracts from the criticisms; and Lena, calling the critics "pigs," remarks that she must invite them again soon. She expresses a longing to get away to some tiny house in the country, where she cannot hear any news, especially about the theatre. Fr. Zinser emphatically protests. The women wax hot in discussion; Lena calls Zinser "ungrateful," and reminds her of her vain attempts to secure theatrical engagement; of how she, Lena, has rescued her. Why is she always so exasperating? Zinser retorts, that she never importuned the agents for an engagement; the trouble is, that ideal views of the theatre no longer exist — and misfortune may come to any one. Lena agrees, trying to pacify her; but her remark that she herself may, some day, become a "parasite" also, enrages Zinser afresh. Peace is made, however, and Lena continues to complain of her life — of the uncertainty of pleasing the public; scorning the idea that the public loves her, and declaring that a star or celebrity is such only until a bigger star appears. Love! What she wants is of another sort — the sort a soldier gives to his beloved cook. If she

could but experience real love, just for once! Doctor Rohr enters, sarcastically parries the efforts of Zinser, (whom he addresses as "heroine,") to keep Lena from playing, argues that the taste of the public is freakish, depending on such trifles as the weather, and begging Lena to act that evening for the sake of the poor author, who did not know his piece would be a failure. It appears that the playwright, Wiesinger, is a friend of his, a young fellow of twenty-two years, a petty clerk in the post-office. He professes himself unable to comprehend why every young man nowadays feels bound to write, and says Wiesinger's family is in despair over his mania for writing. The father, a doctor-professor, has died, leaving his family, after affluence, in poor circumstances; but the young writer is a fine fellow. Zinser, still insisting that Lena shall not act, is informed that it is none of her business, and that she must not agitate the sick woman; and Lena, joining in, attacks Zinser for irritating her from morning till night. Doctor Rohr succeeds in making Lena insist that she will act that evening — she is happy only when she is acting, she lives only then. Rohr calmly admits that he was sure, from the start, that she would play; but he shall announce to the Director that she is really very ill, and he has had great difficulty in persuading her. After Zinser's exit Lena confides to him that there really is something the matter with her, she knows not what; she is melancholy. She is "pining for the Count," declares Rohr. She sets forth her idea of commonplace love; but Rohr insists that happiness as she pictures it does not exist, and is not suited to her, in any case. She cannot expect to have everything — and she already has fame, brilliancy, and the rest of it. As she persists in believing that she wishes "tranquil, modest bliss — just a little happiness, even if it be brief," Rohr suggests and that she perpetrate that "folly" with him. She tells him that he is merely a good friend, "everybody's uncle," and they part on the best of terms. Franz informs her, in answer to her question as to what Fr. Zinser is doing, that she is declaiming "Sappho." Lena orders her carriage for the evening, and inquires whether Indra has called. Zinser, entering, reminds Lena that she has not yet manicured her hands, and spouts excerpts from "Sappho" as she performs her task. The two women get to wrangling again, and Lena declares that she cannot go on living in that way: she is gettng excitable over trifles; but Zinser reminds her that that is her normal condition: when she is at Ostend she wants to be at Ischl, and *vice versa*. Here Franz announces a caller — Leopold Wiesinger, the author of the unsuccessful play. Lena orders that he be shown in and every one else turned away. Wiesinger has come to beg her not to refuse to act that evening — not to afford his enemies that satisfaction. She is sharp with him — says: "I wonder how you have the audacity to live after such a production —" advising him to adopt some other youthful amusement, such as collecting postage-stamps, or riding a wheel, instead of writing. He takes offence: she apologizes, calls him "a stupid boy," and pulls his hair. He declares that if he could live only one day in a year in such luxury as hers, far from all petty worries, he would be happy. He writes in order to attain, momentarily, to an ideal world, without which his official life is intolerable; though he serves gladly and makes no complaint, and his unlucky play has, at least, won for him the opportunity of meeting Lena, for which he is grateful. He, like herself, is longing for happiness — even a brief span of commonplace happiness. At present he is living with his mother and sister: and his sister's friend, Gerta Danzer, comes of an evening to join him in music. His confidences are interrupted by the arrival of Indra, the leader

of the claque, who comes to talk over a re-arrangement of the points for applause, and accepts the gift of a box of cigars at the beginning of the call as easily as he accepts a gift of money at the end. His discussion with Lena is, at times, too frank to be flattering to Wiesinger, and details are arranged for an "ovation" in a certain act. Indra states his views of his business and theatrical life in general. "One must think of nothing else, waking or sleeping, if one is to be successful": and he very practically leaves his address with Wiesinger, in case the latter shall ever require his services. Wiesinger (when Indra has departed), expresses hot indignation at such manœuvres, and insists on going. Lena detains him, and soon they are making love and calling each other respectively "Lena" and "Poldi."

ACT II

Wiesinger's apartment

WIESINGER enters laden with parcels, flowers and dainties. Marie, the fat concierge, informs him that a gentleman has been inquiring for him. She has denied that any such person — or any young man — lives in that house. But the gentleman had called her "a clever creature," left his regards, and bidden her to say that "uncle" has been there, and will return. Rohr presently arrives; and Wiesinger tells him that he is living there incognito, writing a new play, and works better when no one disturbs him. Rohr (who always addresses Wiesinger as "thou") remarks: "*You* are very comfortably settled here," and promptly gives him to understand that the whole town knows about his relations with Lena, which are being discussed in every café, and form the sole topic of conversation in all the theatres. How did they find out? Well, Wiesinger has managed wrongly; he is at the theatre every evening; Lena plays to him alone; and neither of them is ever seen anywhere. Rohr is fond of him, and has sought him out to warn him against going too far with his folly. No; morals have nothing to do with the question; but men do queer things sometimes because of women — shoot themselves or marry their idol. Only, when things get mixed, and the man marries where he ought to shoot himself, or *vice versa,* a horrible mess may be the result. He is trying to save Wiesinger from the follies which he himself has perpetrated — getting into debt, for example, as Wiesinger, obviously, is doing. Besides, Wiesinger does not understand life behind the scenes, and he would do well to talk to his mother, and run off to Italy for a couple of weeks, and forget this passion. — Whose business is it if he loves Lena as a student loves a governess or a seamstress? Well, the lady is not a seamstress, but a theatrical Star — which means a person who has money, glory, admiration, happiness — everything that life can give; but has sold her soul to the devil, the devil being the public. Lena cannot belong to Wiesinger, because she belongs to the public — to every individual of the crowd who has paid his entrance — and has no right to dispose of herself; and the public will not relinquish its claim on her. And Lena herself is conscious of these limitations: she has proved it by devising that modest retreat because she fears Wiesinger cannot endure the life of the stage. Wiesinger forbids Rohr to speak against Lena: and Rohr calmly retorts that he knew nothing would come of his visit, but he has warned him, and now it is his, Wiesinger's affair: Wiesinger is at liberty to be as angry as he pleases: but he will need Rohr yet — in which case, he must come to him.

Wiesinger's sister, Martha, and her friend, Gerta, come in, make themselves very much at home, eat the tart he has brought for Lena, and decline to take his hints that they are not wanted. The hour for Lena's arrival comes — in desperation, he lights a candle and sets it in the window, for a sign, explaining that he does it to prevent the glass cracking with the cold, and upsetting Gerta's mischievous attempt to save the other window by similar means. Wiesinger tries to make them understand that the theatrical director — the guest whom he is, obviously, expecting — is coming to talk over a new play, and will be scandalized to find two young ladies there, even if one of them is his sister. At last they become pervious to suggestion, and depart, Gerta bidding him give her regards and a bunch of violets to the "Director." Lena enters, demanding angrily to know who those girls were; and complaining that she has been standing, waiting, for an hour in the snow. Wiesinger assures her that it was not over ten minutes. Well, — evidently, time has sped rapidly for him! One of them was his sister, was she? And the other? Oh, — the nice girl of whom he has often told her — the one with whom he has skated and played tennis? Well, and she's the one who will soon inherit a hundred thousand, and whom he is intending to marry when he has got tired of sowing his wild oats with the actress! He cannot even part with her violets — oh, they are for her, are they? How touching! Well then, hand them over! — She flings them aside, and Wiesinger observes: "That's just like you." Lena demands a cigarette, and remarks, that it is just what she has expected all along; actresses are all right to amuse oneself with; then the man abandons them and marries some other woman — that's an old story. Wiesinger, losing patience, retorts that she ought to know better about that than he, after her experience: he wonders how long she is going to keep up the row to-day? She makes one every time. — That is because he has an extraordinary talent for exasperating one, she replies; and accuses him of no longer loving her. Presently she begs his pardon, acknowledging that she has a bad disposition — but she loves him so much. Wiesinger impatiently replies that he does love her; and when she insists that the feeling is not the real thing, he breaks out: "There it goes again!" and begs to be informed how he is to prove his affection? — She will not allow any one to know of their relations, lest their feeling be "profaned"; he has ceased to visit his friends; she has grown jealous of his family, and so he has hired that apartment. What more does she want? He goes to the theatre every evening when she acts, and has seen the same play fifty times; does she really imagine that that is interesting? — Oh, he's complaining, is he? And is he quite sure that he is not betraying her? And will he always, always love her? — He replies that he does not know what his feelings may be ten years hence; it is enough that they are happy together today. But immediately taking offence at the tone of her remark, to the effect that "it is absolutely impossible to be angry with him," he answers that she possesses a wonderful talent for upsetting people's nerves, yet, in appearance, she is a regular St. Magdalen. Oh, *he* did not begin it — but there has been enough of this; he has lost all patience. That is the way it goes every time, and he has had his fill. He is young, he wants to enjoy himself, and wishes no sentimentalities — when he gets old the proper time for them will come, and then he will choose — "You will not choose an actress! Why don't you finish your sentence?" interrupts Lena. Whereupon, he begs her pardon, and assures her that he is very fond of her; and finally persuades her to stop weeping and smile upon him. But he argues with her that it is impossible

that a young man should live perpetually in prison, simply because she has taken a fancy to hide from every one; — and, morever, it is sheer nonsense, anyway, for the whole town knows it — ask Rohr — and so does every one at the theatre. — In that case, their wondrous dream is at an end, replies Lena; had they been sufficiently sensible at the right moment they might have shaken hands and parted, preserving pleasant memories. As it is, they will continue to torture each other until their pure feeling becomes sullied. Does he know what it means, behind the scenes, to be called "Lyadinser's lover?" A thing so repulsive that she will not utter it. Wiesinger replies that he does not wish to be her lover, to have a liaison with her, but loves her as purely and sacredly as it is possible for a man to love a woman; what care they for the world? Let people say what they will — why should they hide themselves? Would it not be better if they dined together in her apartment, drove together in the park, and were happy? What he wishes is to be her husband. She says that would be too good"; but he assumes her consent, calls her his "dear, silly little wife," and drinks to her health as such. She suddenly discovers that it is very late, and hastens away, exclaiming "Accursed theatre!" which sentiment Wiesinger heartily echoes.

ACT III

Lena Lyadinser's apartment

LENA has been giving a breakfast in honor of Blum and Koch. Breakfast is over; it is two o'clock. Mosel, a jolly, elderly man heavily intoxicated proposes Lena's health. Wieschdak exclaims that only in theatrical houses can such gay life be seen, and makes Franz bring him a whole bottle of champagne, while Wenig demands Chartreuse. The guests shout, ironically, at intervals: "Wieschdak! Wieschdak!" Blum and Koch superintend Wenig's forthcoming report of the breakfast "in honor of the successful authors of 'The Violet' which has had its fiftieth performance." Among other items Blum suggests that the presence of Count Blowitz be mentioned; to which Koch objects that the Count is now a married man. — He comes now only as a friend? Well, it is extraordinary that he should have taken to calling on Lena again, in any case: how long has he been married? Not quite a year, is it? The charming hostess is terribly nervous — and why is not Wiesinger present? "Lucky he isn't," comments Wieschdak; "he's such a touchy fellow — takes offence at a mere trifle." Flora Denk enters with Von Spahn, who protests that she must not continue to behave herself as she has been doing. No, it is useless for her to deny it; he is not inventing, he saw her, with his own eyes, pressing the men's feet with hers under the table; he dropped his napkin thrice, of deliberate purpose, and saw it every time. Flora retorts, that if he did not like it, he might have mentioned it to her quietly, instead of making such a fuss about it; she is an actress, and if that sort of life does not suit him, he had better marry some petty bourgeoise. Von Spahn vows that everything — positively everything — about her pleases him; but when she tells him that it is none of his business where she is going, he remonstrates against her using such a tone with her betrothed. Doctor Rohr intervenes, and both complain to him. He creates a diversion by introducing Von Spahn to Gallius, and then leading Flora away, with the remark that he will take care of her. Lena and Count Blowitz enter, and Lena expresses her pleasure at seeing him again; to which he replies, that he has long wished to call on

her. Lena proposes that they shall drink, as of old, "to that which we love"; thanks him for his gift of flowers, and asks him how he feels as a married man. He has nothing to complain of, he replies; things were rather amusing at home, in the beginning; his wife was a perfect child — but after a few months, he began to go to the club. And Lena is to be married soon, is she not? Lena nervously refuses to discuss that subject, but declares that there is nothing the matter with her, and offers to mix him his favorite beverage, as of old. Blowitz asks Fr. Zinser what makes Lena so nervous; and she informs him that Wiesinger neglects Lena, has not come to the breakfast, is a nasty little official, quite incapable of understanding stage-life, and unsuited to it, so that he is constantly in a rage. Love! Well, that won't last long! And what good is a married woman on the stage, anyway? An actress should have poetry. But Lena will not listen to a word of remonstrance. — Lena, returning, cordially invites Blowitz to call again; and resisting his half-uttered request to introduce him to Wiesinger (who has made his appearance), promises to do so later. In spite of Rohr's intervention, the men nearly clash, thanks to Wiesinger's rudeness, and Lena accompanies Blowitz to the door. In spite of Rohr's efforts to soothe Wiesinger, the latter rages about the Count, his "predecessor," the guests, the "mob of people," and their behavior in the house of his bethrothed. At last, Rohr tells him, calmly, that of course *he* is to blame; he ought to have known what stage-life is like — the theatre is not a monastery — and actresses are not Court-ladies. If he cannot get accustomed to that style of thing, he had better stay at home instead of prowling around there! And he begs Wiesinger to defer all explanations, as Lena has to play "Phèdre" on the morrow, which is far more important than explanations. Conductor Mosel, very drunk, confesses to Lena that he can never resist the temptation to steal, and has filled his pockets with bon-bons and cigars; but he is not a bad man nevertheless — she ought to see how his conscience torments him for a whole hour the morning after! And he insists on having a bottle of brandy as a gift — for his children! Indra, on being left alone with Lena expresses his sympathy for her, saying that, of course, it is no business of his; but Wiesinger is behaving outrageously, and ought not to insult her before every one — every one is laughing at her Lena begs him to stop, says that the best thing is for people not to worry about her — it will lead to nothing, in any case. Indra insists that things cannot go on in this manner; it is ruining her acting. She no longer has any confidence in herself, because Wiesinger sits in the parterre staring at her, and to please him is utterly impossible. The public is beginning to say that she is failing; her star will soon set, and she will become like Fr. Zinser — and the very first person to turn his back upon her when that happens will be Wiesinger. Such fops "love" only so long as an actress is a celebrity, adored by the public — a "Star." Rohr, returning, asks what ails her, and begs her to compose herself, which she endeavors to do, as she sees Wiesinger enter. "A nice way people behave themselves in your house! "Wiesinger greets her. . . . "The men are drunk and the women . . . the ladies . . . And that in the house of my betrothed! . . . And I am your future husband! What an honor! What happiness!" — She is going to make a scene, is she? Please don't have any tragedy about it — save that for 'Phèdre'! Lena declares that things cannot go on like this; how has she deserved such treatment? what has she done? ("Oh, nothing, of course!") She tells him that he has no right to behave thus — to shame and insult her before people; it is not honorable; he is getting

more nervous every day, everything irritates him, it is absolutely impossible to please him; he is unrecognizable, and she no longer dares to utter a word in his presence. — What has she done? — What has she done? Wiesinger asks. Well, if she insists upon knowing, he will tell her. He has had enough of it. Everything there is repulsive to him — the people, every chair, every plate, everything she does or says, Lena herself, is hateful to him. And he had thought there was poetry there! O Lord! What a fool he has been! — An unconscionable fool, with his thirst for an ideal life, for happiness! Happiness! Ha! Ha! An ideal life and Wieschdak! Poetry, and Flora! — They are all alike — she, her friend Flora, and the rest — one a little more so, another a little less — that is all the difference. Lena, after repeated fruitless efforts at remonstrance, indignantly begs him to go on, so that he may get through as speedily as possible. — What fools men are, he proceeds; they sacrifice their families, their honorable name, for the sake — at best — of being "the last." They believe in the actresses; but the latter are lies incarnate — everything they say or do is a lie, is calculated; and they cannot dispense with lying. In short, that moral climate is ruinous to him; one glance at her and her friend Flora is quite sufficient! "Not every one can be a Gerta!" retorts Lena; and when he curtly bids her hold her tongue, she adds: "Such girls are born with a patent for virtue! One hundred thousand, of course —" ("Silence!") "As a matter of fact, the sole difference between my Flora and your Gerta lies in the money." Again he bids her hold her tongue, approaches, and makes a gesture to strike her. "Strike!" she says. Wiesinger instantly calms down, reminds her that he is sometimes hasty, and she is nervous; that they belong to different circles of society, and one must get used to hers. When they are married — it would be foolish of them to quarrel over trifles. She rejects his proffered caress, and when he suggests that perhaps he had better go away for the time being, she tells him that the best thing he can do is to depart forever. Wiesinger, eventually, replies that it shall be as she pleases — only, she is not to say, later on, that he was to blame; and he is ready to keep his promise. "No, thank you," she says, and undertakes to hold him blameless in the matter. He admits that he has been unjust toward her, is sorry for himself, and begs her not be angry, and says they will never refer to the matter again. — What does he think of her? she demands. Admitting that she is only an actress, and that one can behave as one pleases with actresses, — that's what they are for! She is to forgive him everything forsooth, and he will reward her by marrying her! What an honor for her, and what a deed of mercy on his part! He has made a mistake this time; she is not the kind of woman to endure that sort of thing; she is not ashamed of being an actress, but proud of it. Actresses, it is true, live in a world of their own; but nevertheless, they are none the worse for that; and she can place herself, with a clear conscience, on a level with the women of his sphere. Is she to be held responsible for the many shady things of theatrical life? But she was trying to escape from them, she had dreamed of a different sort of life, purer, more honorable, and had hoped he would stretch forth his hand to help her to it. But he — ! Thank God, that is all over! She is to blame, of course, for being so sentimental; but now the end has come. He has had his actress — it is so fashionable to have an actress! — and she is cured for her whole life of her thirst for tranquil happiness. — Yes, she does find it very easy to part from him, for now she knows him. She has had her dream, but now she has awakened. When he has said, "goodbye" and departed, she soliloquizes: "And so,

goodbye to everything! All is over! And how soon the end of all things has come!" When Rohr enters, she bids him congratulate her — she is free. People who fall in love are stupid; the only happiness consists in being free. Rohr tells her that she will suffer a little at first; but all will pass off before long (when she says how she has loved Wiesinger, and how ready she has been to sacrifice everything for him, and become a good, honorable wife); and that one must always pay the price in this world. Lini appears, to announce that a messenger has just come from the theatre to say that there will be rehearsel at ten the next morning; and Lena, finding that Fr. Zinser has gone to the tailor's, makes Lini sit down in her stead, and hear her go through her part.

Act IV is omitted.